

HILLSDALE HIGH SCHOOL

Smaller Learning Communities Planning Grant Application

Who We Are and What We Have Done:

In our 2000 Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) Accreditation report, we wrote “Hillsdale might just be a comprehensive high school that has the ability to understand the constraints that we face and act nonetheless. There are enough people at Hillsdale that dare to talk about what should be, that we may be able to strike our blows in a way that improves dramatically the education that our students receive. We may not fulfill our vision, but we have a chance, and that is a lot more than many schools can claim.” In the two years since that statement was made, the constraints against which we struggle have become clearer for the very reason that we are now closer to the goal of becoming a school that is structured in order to help all students achieve high standards.

We have, for several years now, been a large, comprehensive high school trying to employ small school strategies in order to better meet the needs of all our students. We are proud of the changes we have made in instructional practices, the benchmark assignments we have designed, and the interventions and remediation we have added. We have tried to raise the bar for what is “good enough” above the “D” grade and beyond mere seat-time for four years. But these efforts have stretched us to the limit. Teachers have given their pound of flesh over and over again. And, frustratingly, many of our students are still not achieving at the level we feel is necessary. If we are to successfully meet the needs of ALL our students, we absolutely must have a structure that allows for greater personalization, authentic learning experiences, frequent revision of work, meaningful exhibitions, and community involvement. Our research and experience has

led us to the point where we are more and more convinced that smaller learning communities are the way to fulfill this vision.

I. The Need

In spite of our best efforts, we still are falling short of our goals. Many students are not achieving the high standards we expect of them and the small school strategies we are attempting are severely limited within the current structure. Teacher burnout is a real concern. We need to go beyond the tinkering of block scheduling, tutorials and higher standards for all students heaped upon a system and faculty already stretched precariously thin. It is time for a redesigned school that “breaks the mold” of traditional models. If we don’t break the mold, we fear the mold will break us and continue to fail our kids.

As we struggle to write this grant proposal and continue to fly the plane we are trying to fix, the everyday needs of our passengers remind us of why we need to redesign our school in order to get them to the destinations they deserve. Over the course of the past 2 weeks there have been two suicide attempts by Hillsdale students. Last week two of our senior boys took a freshman girl off campus, got her drunk and raped her. They were taken away in handcuffs from school the following day. Our basketball team was stripped of their Division Title due to a clerical error by allowing an ineligible athlete to play. Cutting and eating disorders are not uncommon among our female population. Depression and anger stemming from divorce and other family problems burden our kids. Drug and alcohol abuse is all too common ways students self-medicate in futile attempts to deal with these problems. Far too many students receive D’s and F’s. Less than half of the students surveyed for our WASC report agreed that they “see the connection between my classes and my life outside of school.” Our WASC study sites as an area of weakness that “students would like to feel a close personal connection to the school and their

teachers”—but they generally do not. As Linda Darling-Hammond writes in the introduction to the California School Redesign Networks Ten Features of Effective Small Schools, “the factory model school, which we inherited from the efficiency experts of so many years ago, creates a context in which many students experience schools as not caring, even adversarial environments, where getting through becomes important when getting known is impossible.” This is still true for many students at Hillsdale, in spite of our best efforts and until we know them, the social mind fields that they must traverse alone will continue to drag them down academically.

Each year the California Department of Education sets an Academic Performance Index (API) target and growth target for each school in the state. Last year, Hillsdale High School met its school-wide growth target as well as its numerically significant ethnic and socio-economically-disadvantaged subgroup’s growth target. The subgroup identified at Hillsdale is Hispanic/Latino. While our White (not of Hispanic origin) subgroup has an API base of 747, our Hispanic/Latino API base is almost 220 points lower at 529. Although the State might not see a situation where 19% of our students are scoring well below our white population as “under-performing”, this does not meet our standards of success. What is “good enough” for some must be “good enough” for all. Hillsdale was given a statewide rank of 7 and a similar school rank of 3. (1=low, 10=high) Although Hillsdale was not identified as an under-performing school, we are looked at as under-performing within our district. And, when looked at by the Hispanic/Latino students and families, why do we have lower standards?

One of the district-wide goals of the strategic plan is to close the achievement gap. We have been struggling with the under representation of Hispanic/Latino students in our upper level courses. The introduction of the AVID program has helped to slightly

increase minority representation in these courses. However, each grade level is only able to serve 25-30 students at a time. Class size decreases each year due to the lack of free periods for elective courses. Course deficiencies in math and/or science have prevented students from completing UC/CSU requirements. One possible explanation for the failure to meet the requirements is the toughening of standards, the demand of a C- or better to continue to a higher level course. Over half of last year's graduating class continues his/her education at a 2-year community college, and many of those do not even complete their A. A. degree. If we are to truly close the achievement gap and stem the growing tide of mediocrity, we need to examine new structures that will allow for a greater sense of belonging and for more students to be successful.

It has been said that, "Every organization is perfectly organized to get the results that it gets", and our results demonstrate this perfectly. 27.5% of our freshmen received a "D" or "F" in their English and Modern World History classes in the fall. 42% of the sophomores earned a "D" or "F" in English. Clearly something needs to change. We try to address this through staff development but each school year; we are given only three voluntary staff development days. Two of these days are set in the district-wide calendar. One day is before the school year begins for teachers and the other is at the end of the fall semester. The third is a piece-meal day. These voluntary days are grossly insufficient to fully educate, train and develop consensus among the faculty and staff. This semester we voted on increasing the number of instructional minutes per day in order to "bank" time to allow for more staff development time. If the result we are aiming for is a school in which all students are given the preparation and skills necessary for success in college and the workforce, the organization of our school must be changed in a way that will produce those results. Failure rates of over 25% in many cases are not acceptable. In

order to continue to move forward it will take time devoted to study, visitations, planning and staff development. As educators re-invent the wheel in communities across the country, we have few opportunities to learn from the successes and failures of others. As we attempt these reforms piece by piece, we find ourselves more and more frequently talking about the difficulties of redesigning a plane while we fly it. Although we can't land the plane, we do need a crew to stay on the ground once in awhile and get some work done. This planning grant will provide that opportunity.

II. Foundation for Planning:

Just last week, we presented the results of our recent faculty vote on buying back minutes and authorizing a committee to research and draft a plan for the use of smaller learning communities at Hillsdale to our site council, the Hillsdale Community Board (HCB). This board now includes Stanford faculty and a counselor from our primary feeder school as well as teachers, administrators, classified staff, parents, and students. They were impressed with the 92% approval of the plans for two added staff development days and taking more active steps toward exploration and use of smaller learning communities at Hillsdale. We relayed the impatience many on the faculty are beginning to feel with the tinkering process and their desire to clearly define and take the steps necessary to reorganize. At the same time, we all recognize that the process of researching and defining those steps will be time-intensive and require extensive staff development. The two days that we have bought ourselves will be only the beginning. Our board also wisely pointed out the need to inform and involve even more parents. As a result, we are in the process of seeking out parents of sixth graders who would be interested in helping to design the school their children will eventually attend, one which we imagine will involve smaller learning communities.

The faculty is currently organized into several “Ascent Teams” which are all exploring strategies for climbing toward and reaching our goal of achievement of high standards for all students. These teams currently meet once a month for 45 minutes on Monday “late start” days. Of course, the time allotted for this work is woefully inadequate. Since our last staff development day, we have asked all of these teams to consider what shape and role smaller learning communities might have in their plans. The site council is overseeing their work. We are making progress, but much more time and resources will be needed to climb our mountain.

We are very lucky to be in a district that supports our reform efforts. The San Mateo Union High School District’s Strategic Plan, approved in January of 2000, commits to employing strategies that will only be effective and sustainable in a restructured school. First, the plan states that SMUHSD will “mobilize district resources to evaluate, modify and create programs that ensure academic success for all students at every level.” This strategy calls for specific results, including “more interdisciplinary curriculum,” “making the curriculum relevant to the ‘real world;” and “extra support from adults for students-guidance, counseling, tutoring, mentoring and crisis counseling.” On many occasions, the Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent have spoken about the radical change that will be necessary in order meet the needs of all students in these ways. Mr. Mohr, our superintendent, has recently stated that the American comprehensive high school is operating at about 95% capacity and in order to truly serve all students, a major redesign will be needed. The Strategic Plan also calls for the development and enforcement of “performance standards with appropriate interventions and assessments which all students will achieve.” Hillsdale is often used at district meetings as a model for this kind of work, but the district is also aware of the problem of

fitting interventions into our existing structure. In addition to using the tutorials that are part of Hillsdale's block schedule, the Senior Exhibition team at Hillsdale has voluntarily held Saturday sessions and the freshman humanities team gives up their time before school, after school and lunch hour for much of the spring in order to help students meet Benchmark standards for essay writing. But these kinds of interventions, necessitated by our current structure, are not sustainable and will lead to teacher burnout. Accordingly, the district's Strategic Plan also states that SMUSHD will "attract, train, support, retain, and hold accountable the highest quality staff, providing necessary resources." Asking teachers to "ensure academic success for all students" but giving them an organization not designed to do that would drive faculty away in droves, and our district administrators seem to realize that. The superintendent and the assistant superintendent are continually voicing their support of the direction we are headed.

The district has been doing more than just voicing support, however. As a result of the Walter S. Johnson Grant, school leadership teams (SLTs) have been organized and have been receiving training in standards-based education for over a year now in order to build capacity for this important but radical shift. These training sessions are run through a collaboration between our district, the San Mateo County Office of Education, The California School Leadership Academy, and West Ed. Hillsdale is using its site council (HCB) as its SLT, and as a result, parents and students have been learning about standards-based education as well as teachers and administrators. These sessions have begun to raise questions about the need to restructure schools in order to effectively teach to standards. Hillsdale is often the one asking these questions, and is better poised than most to take those steps.

We have had the tremendous fortune to have entered into a Professional Development School (PDS) Partnership with Stanford University beginning last fall. Stanford was attracted to us because of the hard work and innovation we have done, largely without outside support. We are thrilled to now have the support of one of the nation's leading institutions of higher education. Through our relationship with Stanford, we have become a part of the California School Redesign Network, which aims to help "school and district leaders and practitioners examine and share how they and others are approaching: ...learning for organizations: how the structures and routines of schools can be constructed to produce organizations that become increasingly humane, intelligent, supportive of high quality learning, and self-correcting." Our Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Stanford states that we "are committed to the goal of high and equitable student achievement, to effective instructional practice, and to school structures that support student learning." It further states that this will be achieved through:

- Providing continuous professional development for PDS teachers, university faculty, and administration.
- Promoting and conducting inquiry directed at the improvement of teaching and learning (site and university).
- Renewing and redesigning the school and university.

Stanford and Hillsdale both share a vision of equitable learning for all of Hillsdale's students. Our Memorandum of Understanding calls on Hillsdale to be "an exemplar of research-based practice in which professional teaching standards are enacted and student success is the organizing principle for teacher learning and practice." This is a challenging goal to reach, we realize; but with the support of a university like Stanford,

we are significantly closer to attaining it than we were a year ago. We have done significant tinkering on our own, but with this crucial outside support we can fulfill the goals the MOU sets for us: “As a leader in the field, the PDS should organize the work of teaching and learning so that the use of time, space, staffing, and funding support in-depth learning for all students and faculty, and ongoing inquiry and improvement.” Our research and experience tells us that smaller learning communities will allow for this kind of organization and the people we work with at Stanford are clearly of the same mind.

For decades researchers have found what doesn't work; large, bureaucratized schools that fragment learning, isolate teachers, and depersonalize the educational process (Barker and Gump, Goodard; Bryk; etc.). As the offices offering this grant undoubtedly know, there is a growing body of research and evidence which indicates that smaller schools and those that structure longer-term relationships between students and teachers, all else being equal, produce higher achievement, lower dropout rates, more positive feelings and greater participation in school activities, and lower rates of violence and vandalism. When these features of communal schools are connected to powerful approaches to curriculum, teaching, and performance assessment, the results can be extraordinary. Most recently a seven-year longitudinal study of six small schools launched by the Coalition Campus Schools project in New York City, confirmed that small schools which provide strong relationships, high quality teaching, and a learner centered pedagogy produce higher attendance and achievement, lower dropout rates, and far greater access to and success in college (Darling–Hammond, Aness and Ort, in press).

Hillsdale's reforms are grounded in research. Six years ago, the Hillsdale faculty convened its first book club, later to become the “Reform Forum”. Teachers who were

interested in school change voluntarily began meeting for breakfast before school to read and discuss Theodore Sizer's *Horace's Compromise*, *Horace's School* and *Horace's Hope*, Deborah Meier's *The Power of Their Ideas* and George Wood's *Schools That Work*, among others. These faculty members were inspired to seek out models of the changes discussed in these books and visited local schools with academy models, such as Drake High School in Marin County, and Bay Area schools connected with the Coalition of Essential Schools. The idea that students need benchmark assessments of projects which require relevant and authentic learning aimed at cultivating habits of mind (Sizer) motivated Hillsdale faculty to create programs such as the Senior Exhibition. The senior English and social science teachers share the responsibility for leading students through the rigorous process of selecting a topic, forming an essential question, choosing a mentor, finding an adult in the community to interview, researching and writing a 15 page paper, and presenting their findings in a senior year ending exhibition. The responsibility of supporting over 300 students in this process, complete with multiple opportunities for remediation and help, is shared by five teachers and is a rewarding but draining task.

The Hillsdale faculty has continued its efforts to provide students with strong relationships, high quality teaching and learner-centered pedagogy well beyond senior exhibition. Our freshman core program, REALM, was created with the aim of raising the achievement level of all students and grew out of our book club's reading of Arthur Costa's *Discovering and Exploring Habits of Mind*. We found ourselves often struggling with the need to teach students not only what to learn but how to approach the act of learning itself. This program has covered new ground in collaboration by integrating not only English and World History, but Algebra and Math A as well. This team has been

exploring ways to teach freshmen such habits of mind as striving for accuracy, persisting, and thinking flexibly. Costa points out that “teaching toward the habits of mind is a team effort. Because repeated opportunities over a long period are needed to acquire these habits of mind, the entire staff must dedicate itself to teaching toward, recognizing, reinforcing, discussing, reflecting on, and assessing the habits of mind.” Once again, however, we find ourselves attempting small school strategies in a large school setting. This kind of coordinated effort is next to impossible in a school of over a thousand students with a faculty and staff of over 100. With teacher loads of 165 students, it is a Herculean effort to truly personalize education and provide the highest quality teaching. Freshmen teachers, in an effort to help students succeed in a benchmark writing assignment, spent hundreds of hours in one on one tutorials with students who needed remediation. This was often done in sacrifice of prep time, collaboration time and lunchtime. We are struggling to know our students well, to teach to heterogeneous learners, to hold all students to high standards and help them achieve those standards. We are trying to function as if we were “Small enough to sit around a table and iron things out, for everyone to be known well by everyone else...”(Meier), but we are not small enough for that. In its current structure as a comprehensive school of 1100, Hillsdale is well over the 200-400 recommended by many school reform writers (Cotton, p. 7). We keep trying to be small while we are still big. Obviously, to achieve the results we desire, we can no longer try to be something we are not.

Our awareness that we are attempting strategies in a structure not designed to produce the results we desire has become abundantly clear to us over the past year, and we have begun to research not only new strategies but new school designs as well. This past summer, a group of Hillsdale teachers attended the (California Redesign Network)

Small Schools Institute at Stanford University. Jackie Ancess and Cee Cee Cunningham led us through literature about the various forms small schools might take and the processes involved in creating small schools. During the week our team attended the seminar, we learned much about the possibilities for Hillsdale and many of us developed a strong belief that breaking into small schools is the best way Hillsdale can help all of its students achieve high standards. Since that week, another group has attended the Coalition of Essential Schools Conference and attended several sessions on small schools. Nathan Hale High School of Seattle, Washington discussed how they broke their school down into freshman core academies and explained that giving a group of teachers time during the workday the previous year was the key to their success. A school from Denver gave some initial reports on how their attempts to break the school into three separate entities is unfolding. While at a Roundtable Discussion at the CES Conference, we were lucky enough to have Deborah Meier sit in on the Julia Richman School of New York's session on small school change and sustenance. Their "hothousing" approach to integrating separates schools into a once comprehensive school campus was appealing to us. Unfortunately, we have merely been able to obtain one staff development day since then to discuss it on a school-wide level.

We are very cognizant of the fact that we need to do more than just pay lip service to the use of smaller learning communities if they are to have results we desire and research suggests they can have. In her *New Small Learning Communities: Findings from Recent Literature* (2001), Kathleen Cotton cites Robert Gladden (1998) who writes, "One fear of small school reformers and researchers is that the growing success of small school reform might transform the concept into a buzzword with little meaning (114)." Cotton goes on to quote research and development specialist, Sarah Dewees, who cautions that,

“without full implementation, many of the benefits of small-scale schooling cannot be realized.” We have to escape what Linda Darling-Hammond has defined for us as the “zone of proximal development. We have been there and done that. Structure and instructional strategies must go hand in hand if we are to meet the needs of our students. Gladden writes, “smaller size establishes the groundwork for deeper school reforms by improving and streamlining the relationship between faculty and administrators, but, in itself does not trigger these types of reforms... Smallness alone cannot create satisfying relationships or academic focus.” (Cotton, p. 5) We realize that smaller learning communities are not a silver bullet and that, as researcher Michelle Fine says, “‘small’ is simply a vehicle for doing other rigorous, accountable work” (Cotton, p.5).

Many of our faculty members are well versed in the basics of smaller learning communities and why they serve students more effectively than comprehensive high schools. Our entire faculty, however, still needs time to learn about the possibilities and how to teach in that new structure. Furthermore, while we have learned about many small school successes, we have also learned of at least one school that implemented an academy structure in a school that was divided about whether or not to break up the comprehensive model. Within five years, the tension between those that were in the academies and those that were out tore the system apart and the teachers who put great time and effort into the academies left the school, one by one. We recognize the dangers of venturing into smaller learning communities without adequate research and planning and are grateful for the possibility this grant would create to do such vital groundwork

III. Feasibility and Soundness of the Planning Process

Hillsdale has been tinkering toward smaller learning communities for over a decade; gradually becoming a school seriously committed to reform. Hillsdale’s

integrated freshman humanities program, with its use of authentic assessment and increased personalization through teacher collaboration, has been a model for others in the district. While this model was at first only in the honors program, we soon realized the inequity and now offer this instructional program to all our students. For many years, students have described this program as their best experience at Hillsdale. This year, the collaboration, now known as REALM, focused on “habits of mind”, has grown to include several math teachers.

Five years ago, a group of English and social science teachers, having read about the Coalition of Essential Schools and visited a few member schools, felt the need to have students demonstrate their achievement of Hillsdale’s “Expected School-Wide Learning Results” (ESLRS) and make their senior year more meaningful. As a result, Hillsdale’s Senior Exhibition was created. All seniors ask an “essential question”, research an answer, and exhibit their findings in a 15- page research paper and in an oral presentation open to the community. Since the implementation of this benchmark assignment, we have modified instruction at lower grade levels and created other benchmarks in order to provide scaffolding and prepare students for what they will be asked to do in their senior year. “The American Dream Project” in their junior year and the ninth grade “Peacemaker Project” are benchmark assignments, integrated into the English and social science curriculum, which prepare students for what they will be asked to do in the years ahead. Three years ago the Math Department instituted “The Growth Project” which provides students in Algebra 3-4 with additional instruction and experience in preparation for their Senior Exhibition. Common rubrics linked to several of our ESLRs have been developed and used in many departments and across all grade levels. These benchmark assignments hold all students to high standards, but teachers carrying loads of up to 165 students teach

them. As a result, our students are not being as successful as we feel they can and should be. Their needs are too great. Only with greater personalization and more flexibility in our use of time will we be able to help students achieve at a level that will prepare them for the knowledge-based society of the 21st Century.

We began our most extensive experiment with smaller-learning communities and “looping” two years ago with the Social Action Academy. This two year program, mixing juniors and seniors from the middle and bottom quartiles of our population, has attempted to provide a more personalized and integrated English and social science curriculum involving project-based service learning, which is linked with themes discussed in class. For the first time, students are beginning to refer to a program other than the freshman humanities program as their best experience at Hillsdale. But this is still just two periods out of their otherwise traditionally structured day. We believe that many of the students in this class are enjoying school more than they ever have before. But their skills and their grades do not yet reflect that. Tinkering has some rewards, but it is not enough.

Last year, after many years of exploring reform on our own, we had the tremendous fortune to attract the interest of Stanford University’s School of Education. We are now in our first year of a Professional Development School Partnership through which we provide support and training for 10 teacher candidates and, conversely, Stanford provides us with assistance in our reform efforts. As a result of this relationship we sent a team of seven teachers from several different departments to the California Redesign Networks Smaller Learning Community Workshop at Stanford University last summer and another team to the Coalition of Essential Schools Conference in Seattle last November. At our staff development day in January, Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond,

Stanford Professor and nationally recognized leader in school reform, spoke about smaller learning communities. Enthusiasm spread throughout our faculty for exploring how to restructure our school in order to better use all the strategies and tools we have been developing. Subsequently, the faculty voted to extend each period by one minute for the remainder of the year in order to “buy” us two more staff development days to learn and plan more. 92% of the faculty supported this use of time and a plan to draft a proposal for the use of smaller learning communities at Hillsdale. Most recently, a team made up of teachers from the Science, Fine Arts, Special Education, Physical Education and Social Science departments has expressed interest in creating an Environmental Academy. We continue to be a dynamic and open faculty pursuing the vision of a school that truly meets the needs of all students. But the time has come to take some truly bold steps and create a structure that will support our efforts rather than work against them.

Hillsdale is uniquely poised to move from being a large, comprehensive high school tinkering with reforms to being an institution that fully utilizes the personalization smaller learning communities can create in order to help all students achieve higher standards. It is not acceptable to us that honors classes are primarily Asian and white. The current rates of D’s and F’s are not acceptable in our eyes. We are aware that the words “all students” demand a radical shift in direction for larger schools like ours, which have traditionally served to sift and sort students rather than fully meet their needs. This awareness and commitment has been a part of our vision since Hillsdale adopted a mission statement calling for a school in which “all students are held to high academic standards in an environment that welcomes and challenges every individual to learn and grow” and in which “we seek new ways to help all students embrace the knowledge and skills needed to adapt and thrive in a world of change.” The support that our faculty

gives these words can be seen in their tremendous efforts to truly work with all students, not leaving anyone behind. The multiple benchmark assignments being used at several grade levels demonstrate this. We are doing all that we can to make sure that there are not classes simply being turned into dumping grounds. Our best evidence of teacher involvement and support is the hard work we are doing. Ours is a faculty that is willing to and has tried different approaches. The Social Action Academy, the freshman humanities and REALM programs, AVID and the emerging Environmental Academy are all smaller learning communities that we are trying to sustain and squeeze into a large school structure. In many ways, we already have a culture that supports smaller-learning communities; what we need is a structure that supports them as well. In order to get there, we need resources to do the research and planning.

We know of few schools that can say that all their students can research and complete a 15-page paper and defend a thesis both in written and oral form. We are attempting to do this in a large school structure. All seniors do this work. All juniors write and research a paper that prepares them for this. All freshmen do research, writing and oral presentation work that prepares them for their next years at Hillsdale. Our faculty is committed, even in our current structure, to meeting the needs of all students and ensuring that they complete their education here with the skills they will need beyond Hillsdale. Creating a school that is a place where all students feel like they belong and can learn has been a part of our vision for sometime. In keeping with that vision and as a result of our WASC self-study, in the spring of 2001 we revised our mission statement to include “developing greater personalization and a culture that embodies integrity, honesty, and individual responsibility through smaller learning communities and collaboration.” Our Hillsdale Community Board (HCB) made up of faculty,

administration, staff, students and parents adopted this new Mission Statement. Now is the time to create a structure using smaller learning communities that will allow us to fulfill that vision.

What those smaller learning communities will look like and how to implement them is part of the work that we still must do. However, there are aspects of our school culture and strategies outlined in our mission statement that we think would be shared by those smaller learning communities. We do not want to fall into the trap of creating de facto tracking, with some smaller learning communities having higher standards than others. Rubrics and aligned standards would be shared among smaller learning communities housed on our campus in houses or schools-within a school. We strongly believe in the importance of students exhibiting their work and expect all smaller learning communities to maintain that tradition. Our Mission Statement also places a high value on “project-based learning coupled with traditional instruction” and smaller learning communities should maintain and better fulfill that vision. The greater personalization found in small schools should assist us in, as our Mission Statement outlines, “creating school pride and a safe community through greater respect for self, others, and our environment.” Darling-Hammond and members of the California School Redesign Network have drafted “Ten Features of Effective Small Schools, ” based on the lessons learned from the success stories of actual small schools. Our faculty began to examine these at the last staff-development day and found them, overall, to be features that we too should value. These features are:

- 1) personalization
- 2) continuous relationships
- 3) high standards and performance assessment

- 4) authentic curriculum
- 5) adaptive pedagogy
- 6) multi-cultural and anti-racist teaching
- 7) knowledgeable and skilled teachers
- 8) teacher collaboration and professional development
- 9) family and community connections
- 10) democratic decision-making

Once again, obviously, we need to do more than simply pay lip service to these features. A predominate part of our planning process must and will involve how to effectively infuse these features into the smaller learning communities we create. We must involve students and parents in this planning process in order to best determine and meet the needs of these key stakeholders. Ultimately, we must create a school where all students regardless of race, class and other societal stigma, can achieve to their fullest potential.

The Hillsdale staff has committed to a one year planning process that will lead to a decision to implement Smaller Learning Communities at Hillsdale High School. We envision the completion of the following activities over the course of the year. In fact, the time line has already begun with the formation of the Smaller Learning Community Committee and the agreement by the HCB to coordinate the change process. If done carefully and properly, with the added resources of the Smaller Learning Community Planning Grant, this planning process will lead to the implementation of Smaller Learning Communities as a means of attaining Hillsdale's end goal, the achievement of high standards by all students.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES	MONTH											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Identify and secure necessary resources to conduct planning process	X											
Train Hillsdale Community Board (HCB) to oversee/manage the planning/change process	X	X										
Form school wide committee (Smaller Learning Communities Committee-SLCC) responsible for conducting planning process	X	X										
Extend and complete existing needs assessment	X	X										
Build staff capacity/understanding of SLCs (goal: commitment to SLCs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> plan school visitations (successes and failures) invite guest speakers and experts create library of readings distribute relevant readings - continue Faculty Book Club attend relevant conferences facilitate staff research of specific issues that arise (e.g., role of electives, Advanced Placement, student government in SLCs) 		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Identify current programs, policies and cultural elements of Hillsdale High School that need to be maintained in transition to SLCs (e.g., equity, senior exhibition, athletics, and other features of effective schools)		X	X									
Develop and Implement Plan for communication with and involvement of all stakeholders (goal: support of SLC plan) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> parents (Hillsdale and feeder schools) students community agencies district staff and Board of Trustees other partners (e.g., SMCOE School to Career Consortium, Service Learning Organization, Stanford School of Education) 		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Research and identify time schedule changes necessary for support of transition to SLC (e.g., Year Round Education)		X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
Explore and identify best practice instructional strategies to support SLCs and new time schedule		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Integrate related work of two Hillsdale teachers on sabbatical (elements of future SLCs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Exhibition extended to include service learning • Senior exit portfolios of ESLR and Standards work 		X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
Narrow planning focus - Identify elements of SLC models that are relevant/appropriate for Hillsdale High School							X	X	X			
Draft Implementation Plan							X	X	X			
Allow for final review and modification by all stakeholder groups									X	X	X	
Approval of Implementation Plan										X	X	
Complete Annual Performance Report - Planning Grants												X
Apply for Federal Implementation Grant											X	X

IV. Commitment of Resources:

Hillsdale is now at the point where our staff understands the need for a bold move if we are to attain our ultimate goal of higher standards being achieved by all students. We are committed by a 92% vote of the faculty to one year of focused research and planning on Smaller Learning Communities, the bold move that we feel offers the greatest potential for success.

The project objectives and activities (pages 19 and 20) are supported by our budget as outlined in the budget narrative. The support Hillsdale enjoys from our superintendent is demonstrated in his letter of support (Appendix) and his support for our Professional Development School Partnership with Stanford University. Over the course of next year we need to guide and support our staff and community in this exploration and development. If successful, we will emerge from this year with a clear plan for implementing Smaller Learning Communities at Hillsdale High School, and more importantly be closer to becoming a school where all students achieve higher standards.